

# Natural Resources Management Plan 2015–2025

## Have Your Say

### *Discussion paper No 1: Overabundant Native Species*



This discussion paper is part of a series covering all of the 'Big Issues' raised by the community during meetings and workshops about the new Kangaroo Island NRM Plan. It provides a summary of the current state of knowledge about the issue, suggests courses of action and identifies who might work together with us in addressing it.

*We now invite your comments, suggestions, criticisms and ideas.*

### Issues

Kangaroo Island's original landscape has been transformed since European settlement into a patchwork of native vegetation interspersed with cleared agricultural land. The abundance of pasture, crops and water points adjacent to patches of scrub has encouraged an increase in the numbers of kangaroos, wallabies and possums, as well as other native species, including introduced native species such as koalas and Cape Barren geese.

The resulting increase in grazing and browsing pressure caused by excessive numbers of native animals has an impact on agriculture and native vegetation. Increased possum numbers have an impact on native birdlife through eating eggs and competing with hollow-nesting birds such as glossy black-cockatoos. There are costs associated with fencing to keep native animals out of certain areas and to control their populations.

Landholders who wish to take action to reduce the pressure of these species on their properties and production systems are currently obliged to obtain destruction permits from DEWNR. However, controlling the animals in this way is costly in time and resources, wasteful in that the destroyed animals cannot be



Natural Resources  
Kangaroo Island



Government  
of South Australia

used commercially in any way (they are mostly being left to rot) and despite existing codes of practice ([www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/wildlife-trade/natives/wild-harvest](http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/wildlife-trade/natives/wild-harvest)) and best intentions may result in animals being injured and dying slow and agonising deaths.

Feral cat populations are strengthened by the availability of carcasses of culled animals to feed on, with resulting negative impacts on small mammals, birds and reptiles and the spread of diseases such as sarcosporidiosis and toxoplasmosis.

On the flip side, the abundance of wildlife is one of the region's key drawcards. It is a major attraction for tourists and reason for people choosing to move to live on Kangaroo Island. Also, the local western grey kangaroo and tammar wallaby are genetically distinct from populations found on the mainland and their distinctiveness should be preserved. Tammar wallabies were once widespread across South Australia and Western Australia but are now restricted to scattered populations in the south-west and on Kangaroo Island. A recent reintroduction into Innes National Park on Yorke Peninsula from a feral population in New Zealand came from animals originally captured on the mainland. Brushtail possums have also declined in abundance on the mainland, particularly in arid areas, and are currently being reintroduced to the Flinders Ranges.

It is apparent that the current means of dealing with the challenge is less than ideal for a number of reasons. There are concerns about animal welfare, the wastage of potentially valuable animal products and the cost of control without any means of offsetting it against income. At the same time the increasing impacts on native vegetation and primary production require some action to be taken.



## Suggested actions

It has been suggested by a number of stakeholders that a sustainable commercial harvesting programme should be investigated and, if found to be appropriate and feasible, the opportunity should be put to the market. Preliminary investigations could also reveal the potential viability of a commercial harvest, although the responsibility for developing full business plans would rest with interested private parties.

The commercial harvesting of kangaroos for meat and hides already takes place in South Australia and further afield. Wallaby meat is sought after by top-end Sydney restaurants and possum pelt slippers and possum fur knitted articles are produced in Tasmania and New Zealand. It is therefore likely that the meat, hides, pelts and fur of the different species could be utilised for one purpose or another and that small, value-adding, local businesses may be able to become established based on some of these resources.

Potential impediments to the viability of commercial harvesting do exist though and include:

- » cost and viability of establishing local processing facility or cost of getting the harvest to existing mainland processing facility
- » variable demand for kangaroo meat (although large markets potentially exist in China and India, Russia has cancelled importing Kangaroo meat from Australia)
- » consumer taste preferences for the meat of different kangaroo species
- » oversupply of kangaroo meat on the market
- » the incidence of parasites and/or worms in kangaroos from wetter areas
- » activist pressure on shoe and other manufacturers using kangaroo leather resulting in decreased demand or prices offered for female kangaroo hides
- » the need to establish regulation and monitoring systems.

Under the *South Australian National Parks and Wildlife Act 1972* (NPWA), kangaroos are protected fauna and DEWNR is responsible for their protection. The utilisation of kangaroos is regulated under the same Act and *South Australian National Parks and Wildlife (Kangaroo Harvesting) Regulations 2003* through the issue of various permits and tags. In terms of the Commonwealth's *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*, a wildlife trade management plan is required:

- » to ensure the conservation of the species
- » to mitigate the damage caused by the species through commercial harvest
- » to ensure that the harvest is ecologically sustainable
- » in order for permits to be issued for the commercial export of wildlife products.

Such plans (e.g. the *South Australian Kangaroo Management Plan 2013 – 2017*) set the framework for commercial harvesting to provide for the management of wildlife populations in accordance with the principles of ecologically sustainable development.

The commercial harvesting of kangaroos in South Australia is presently restricted to red kangaroos, western grey kangaroos (but not the KI subspecies) and euros and to the Commercial Harvest Management Regions, of which KI is presently not one. The local subspecies of western greys and tammar wallabies would therefore need to be considered for inclusion. A further consideration is that under the current plan, kangaroos cannot be commercially harvested for their hides alone. The possibility exists for the next plan to be changed, following due process.

The commercial harvesting of brushtail possums is currently not approved under the NPWA and a strong case would need to be made for such. Further, a suitable management plan and population monitoring program would be needed. One of the key challenges in preparing a management plan for the commercial harvesting of overabundant native species relates to the current lack of information about population numbers and the inaccurate official records of animals currently being destroyed. Anecdotal data suggests that considerably more animals are being destroyed than have been permitted, either due to landholders not obtaining permits or because of the under-reporting of what is shot.

Obtaining reliable population estimates in areas with dense scrub and variable topography is difficult and would likely require the use of different methods to those practised on the mainland, where fly-over transects are commonly used to establish population numbers. There is also a need to improve understanding of population ecology, particularly in the light of threats such as climate change and disease.

Harvesting quotas and the design of a harvesting system would need to ensure that wildlife still remains visible for tourists. Harvesting could be restricted to certain zones and not be uniform across the landscape.

Concerns have been raised about possible visitor perceptions around wildlife harvesting and this issue would warrant further investigation. However, the sustainable harvesting of wildlife is practised by many cultures around the world and is widely understood to have positive triple bottom line benefits if properly managed. Visitors would need to be suitably informed about the issues, enabling them to understand the benefits, including addressing animal welfare concerns through having professional shooters guaranteeing humane destruction. In some cases fencing land that is in critical need of protection will remain a necessary but expensive strategy for reducing the impact of overabundant native species on native vegetation and agriculture.



## Strategies and priorities

- » Identify legislative requirements for and restrictions to commercial harvesting and establish the process for how these should be addressed.
- » Establish industry interest in and preliminary commitment to a commercial harvest based on a reasonable degree of confidence in commercial viability.
- » Investigate and agree on appropriate method(s) for determining current population levels and understanding population dynamics and distribution in order to determine sustainable levels of harvesting for each species, taking into account the potential impacts of factors such as disease and climate change. If harvesting commences, ongoing population monitoring will be required to ensure that there is no detrimental impact on any of the species.
- » Consider the potential for negative outcomes, for example increased predation of small mammals, birds and reptiles if carcasses are not available for cats to feed on.
- » Facilitate the development of management plans for overabundant native species that will allow for their commercial harvest.
- » Understand public and visitor perceptions and sentiments regarding the commercial use of native species.
- » Ensure proper public and visitor understanding and acceptance through appropriate communications, awareness raising and education.

## Partners

- » Research Agencies
- » DEWNR: Kangaroo Management
- » Industry
- » Regional Development Adelaide Hills, Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island
- » Tourism Kangaroo Island
- » Community

## *What are your thoughts?*

1. Have all the key issues relating to this BIG ISSUE been adequately captured and understood?
2. Are there any gaps or misinterpretations?
3. What is the overall trend in relation to this issue — are matters improving or deteriorating, how fast and why?
4. In order to address this challenge, will the 'business as usual' approach work, or is adaptation (substantial change) or transformation (complete rethink of how we do business and how we tackle this issue) needed?
5. Do you agree with the strategies and priorities listed and/or do any need adding?
6. Who are the partners that need to collaborate to address this challenge?

*Images: Feral cat, Byron Shire Council; Wallaby with brioche and pear chutney, Lenah Game Meats of Tasmania; Possum slippers, Heirloom Weavers.*

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

Natural Resources Kangaroo Island  
37 Dauncey Street Kingscote SA 5223  
P 08 8553 4444  
E [kinrc@sa.gov.au](mailto:kinrc@sa.gov.au)  
[www.naturalresources.sa.gov.au/kangarooisland](http://www.naturalresources.sa.gov.au/kangarooisland)

